



Florida High Schools Model United Nations

FHSMUN 43

AD HOC WORKING GROUP
TREATMENT OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

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“Freedom of religion or belief is a human right, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, this right is being tested.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres' message for the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, observed on 22 August 2021

COMMITTEE BRIEF

Introduction

Treatment of ethnic and religious minorities is an issue that has been debated since the dawn of civilization. Ever since Homo sapiens began to develop societies and eventually today's nation states, there have been examples of both persecution of minorities as well as attempts to afford them protections. Notable examples from history include the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain in 1492, *apartheid* in South Africa, and the struggle for equality among indigenous populations throughout the world. Tensions with religious minorities and different ethnic groups have culminated in unimaginable horrors that include some of the 20th century's most notable genocides.

The term "genocide" itself is defined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group..." and it is not surprising that in almost all these cases the groups targeted are regional minorities.¹ Conflicts that are widely accepted as genocide under the modern definition include: the systematic extermination of the Jewish and other non-"Aryan" populations by the Nazis in the Holocaust; the deportation and mass murder of Armenians by the Ottoman empire; and the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs during the Balkan wars of the 1990s.² Arguably the most headlined, and most internationally controversial, of modern genocides is the ongoing persecution of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. In early February 2020, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered the government of Myanmar to recognize the 1948 Genocide Convention and "prevent genocidal violence."³ However, the Security Council – due to objection from Russia and China – failed to release an official statement condemning Myanmar. Several nations, including the United States, Australia, Canada, South Korea, and those of the European Union, have since imposed independent sanctions against Myanmar and select military personnel.⁴

The UN System strives to address the rights and concerns of indigenous peoples through multiple channels and entities. The UN System has emphasized indigenous participation in development projects since the introduction of the Brundtland Report in 1987 and this emphasis was broadened and deepened at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) hosted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1995, the UN System and many national governments reaffirmed these emphases at the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) in Copenhagen, Denmark. In July 2000, the UN established the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) under the direction of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA); the 17th Session of the Permanent Forum is scheduled for April 16-27, 2018. The General

¹1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention)

²Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2013 pp. 57-893

³Owen Bowcott and Rebecca Ratcliffe, "UN's Top Court Orders Myanmar To Protect Rohingya From Genocide," The Guardian, Published January 23, 2020,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/23/international-court-to-rule-on-rohingya-genocide-safeguards>.

⁴Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, "The Rohingya Crisis," Council on Foreign Relations, Published January 5, 2018; last modified January 23, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/rohingya-crisis>.

Assembly called for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples to occur between 2005 and 2014 (A/RES/59/174) and the General Assembly hosted a High Level Plenary Session in September 2014 that was named the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

The UN System also created the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the post of Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and a variety of specialized Agencies maintain indigenous peoples' fora, including the International Fund for Agriculture and Development's (IFAD) Indigenous Peoples' Forum. IFAD's Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility doles out \$10,000-\$30,000 grants for small grassroots sustainable projects; with assistance from the World Bank and the governments of Canada, Finland, Italy, and Norway, the Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility financed 73 sustainable development projects in 47 countries in the period 2007-08.⁵ Ensuring that these programs and funds are well-financed internationally is critical to promoting their centrality as well as their long-term viability.

However, routine discrimination and lack of equal treatment before the law is a more widespread phenomenon and, in many instances, can trace its origins back hundreds of years. In recent years, the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement by Black-Americans in the United States demonstrated renewed attention to the continued systematic oppression and societal biases post-emancipation. Left unresolved, this discrimination often leads to instances where a persecuted minority group demands equality and/or a separate homeland or country, whether through peaceful or violent means. Therefore, enforcement of existing laws against discrimination of ethnic and religious minorities, including indigenous communities, and the support of peaceful coexistence among groups can not only lift the social freedoms and economic conditions of millions but may also help avert avoid future bloodshed and ethnic genocide.

While gender and sexuality will not be one of the specific categories analyzed within this paper, it is essential to recognize that women and girls, non-binary individuals, and those who identify within the LGBTQ+ community all confront additional layers of disfranchisement within their own ethnic and/or religious groups.

Definition – What constitutes a Minority?

One of the most pertinent challenges with developing policy around minority rights at the global level is that there is no common agreement on a definition of "minority." According to a definition offered in 1977 by Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, a minority is:

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the

⁵ Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), "Recognizing poverty's diversity, turning indigenous peoples' uniqueness into asset for economic development will help meet their needs" HR/4987 May 26, 2009.

population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language. ⁶

However, some scholars have argued that defining a minority group as one that is numerically smaller than the dominant group, can leave out non-dominant groups that are majorities in their countries, such as Blacks in apartheid South Africa. The United Nations Minorities Declaration, (adopted by consensus in 1992) refers to “minorities as “based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity, and provides that States should protect their existence.”⁷ In addition, various other bodies have also attempted to better define the term, including the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms which proposed the following definition:

[A national minority refers to a] group of persons in a state who reside on the territory of the state and are citizens thereof; " mainly longstanding firm and long-lasting ties with a state; display distinctive ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics; are sufficiently representative, although smaller in number than the rest of the population of the state or of a region a/the state. ⁸

What is widely accepted is that recognition of minority status is not solely for the State to decide but should be based on both objective criteria (such as the existence of a shared ethnicity, language or religion) and subjective criteria (individuals must identify themselves as members of a minority). This is again exemplified in the current Rohingya crisis where the Myanmar government refuses “to grant the Rohingya citizenship, and as a result the vast majority of the group’s members have no legal documentation, effectively making them stateless.”⁹ Despite the Rohingya tracing their roots back to the 15th century, the government refuses to recognize the term ‘Rohingya’ and instead considers members of the community as “Bengali” and therefore belonging to neighboring Bangladesh.¹⁰ A similar situation occurred in Turkey where the government “tried to deprive [the Kurds] of Kurdish identity by designating them ‘Mountain Turks,’ outlawing their language and forbidding them to wear traditional

⁶E/CN.4/Sub.2/384/Rev.1, para. 568. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinorityRights_en.pdf

⁷Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Minorities.aspx>

⁸Recommendation 1201 (1993) on an Additional Protocol on the Rights of National Minorities to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Cited in Florence Benoit-Rohmer.. pp. 13

⁹ Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, “The Rohingya Crisis,” Council on Foreign Relations, Published January 5, 2018; last modified January 23, 2020

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State, REPORT 261 / ASIA 22 OCTOBER 2014 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/myanmar-politics-rakhine-state>

Kurdish costumes in the cities.”¹¹ These examples together demonstrate a tactic which governments may use to prevent the issue of minority rights from even being discussed: simply not recognizing a minority community.

Another lens through which to view minority groups is to note that a minority group usually does not only seek to preserve its identity but also tries to give stronger expression to that identity. “While for the dominant group in a society (majority), their particular identity is transparent and not perceived by them as a specific identity, for non-dominant groups (minorities); their identity is always experienced as particular and as specific to them as members of a group.”¹² Consider the Jewish community in both Europe and the United States as an example of the modern preservation of an ethnicity, culture, identity and customs that are distinct from the majority Christian populations of the nations they inhabit. As preservation of culture is often fundamental to a minority population’s identity, minority cultures must be given equal and (in some cases) special protections, or, when needed, legal measures to ensure the effective participation of members of minority communities in political and societal decisions which affect them.

It should be noted that minority groups are not limited to ethnic and religious groups. Minority groups can be defined on multiple grounds, including gender, sexuality, physical and mental impairment disabilities and even political ideologies (e.g. the persecution of communists in Germany and Spain during the 1930s). However, for the purposes of this committee, minority status will be limited to ethnic and religious grounds; indigenous communities will be included within the purview of this committee.

According to widely accepted statistics, 5,000 of the world’s cultures are classified as indigenous, comprising at least 476 million people in over 90 countries.¹³ The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) notes that “while they constitute 5 per cent of the world’s population, they make up 15 per cent of the world’s disadvantaged.”¹⁴ Indigenous cultures are found in all regions of the world, from the Amazon to the Arctic Circle, and from the Sahara to Siberia. There is no universally accepted or applied definition of indigenous peoples. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) asserts that “the United Nations does not define ‘indigenous peoples’, as it is impossible to capture the full range and diversity of indigenous peoples around the world.”¹⁵

¹¹ “Kurdish Profile: Who are the Kurds”, Washington Post Company, Accessed Jan 15th, 2018

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/feb99/kurdprofile.htm>

¹² The Rights of Minorities in International Law: Tracing Developments in Normative Arrangements of International Organizations, Antonija Petričušić, Croatian International Relations Review, Vol. XI No.38/39 2005

https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/421246.CIRR_Petricusic_MR_IL.pdf

¹³ United Nations Development Programme, “10 Things to Know About Indigenous Peoples,” July 29, 2021.

¹⁴ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, “Who are Indigenous Peoples?” 2015. Found at: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf

¹⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), “Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” Handbook for Parliamentarians No. 23 2014 p. 11.

The UN System has crafted a series of working guidelines based upon the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO Convention No. 169 – 1989) that includes:

“self-identification as belonging to an indigenous people, nation, or community; a common ancestry and historical continuity with pre-colonial or pre-settler societies; a special relationship with ancestral lands, which often forms the basis of the cultural distinctiveness of indigenous peoples; distinct social, economic and political systems, as well as a distinct language, culture, beliefs and customary law; formation of non-dominant groups within society; and determination to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity...”¹⁶

The Tyranny of the Minority Confronts the Tyranny of the Majority: Burundi

Like neighboring Rwanda, tensions between rival ethnic groups have long provided the backdrop for conflict in Burundi. The Hutus and Tutsis are the country's two major ethnic groups, with the Hutus making up some 85 percent of the population to the Tutsis' 14 percent.¹⁷ Despite that disparity, the first post-independence government to take power in Burundi was Tutsi-led, as the monarch who had held power during colonial Belgian rule became the leader of an independent Burundi. Following the country's transition to a parliamentary democracy, Hutus won a majority of votes and seats in Burundi's parliament in elections in 1965, but King Mwambutsa V refused to recognize elements of the results and installed a Tutsi prime minister. This led to increased tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis, and political instability; Mwambutsa was overthrown in July 1966 by his son, who was then himself deposed that November by Michel Micombero.¹⁸

Micombero, a Tutsi, instigated the first Burundian genocide in 1972, targeting Hutus following an uprising in the southern part of the country; estimates are roughly 120,000 people were killed either by the government's forces directly or at their behest. His government was later deposed, and following further conflicts and coups, Burundi became a one-power state under Tutsi rule. Further massacres of Hutus took place into the late 1980s before a new constitution was approved in 1992, calling for multi-party elections and governance. Like in 1965, Hutu-led parties won majorities in the elections, but this time, they were allowed to take power; Hutu Melchior Ndadaye became president in June 1993 as a result. However, his term in office was short lived as Tutsi soldiers assassinated him that October, leading the country into the throes of civil war.¹⁹

A new Hutu president was sworn into power in January 1994, but like his predecessor Ndadaye, Cyprien Ntaryamira did not last in office very long a plane carrying him and Rwandan

¹⁶ IPU, “Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” 2014 pp. 11-12.

¹⁷ CIA World Factbook, "Burundi," 12 January 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/by.html>.

¹⁸ BBC, "Burundi profile — timeline," 14 December 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid

president Juvénal Habyarimana was shot down over Kigali by still unknown assailants, sparking the more well-known Rwandan genocide and leading to further tensions in Burundi. Further conflict plagued Burundi through the 1990s, as former president Pierre Buyoya – who was defeated in the country's first free elections in 1993 – seized power in 1996. By 2000, the beginnings of conflict resolution were appearing as government forces and Tutsi rebel groups signed ceasefire agreements, but Hutus continued to hold out, leading to more flareups of violence.²⁰

In an effort to reach a lasting peace, stakeholders both within and outside of Burundi met in 2000 in Arusha, Tanzania to hammer out what has now been known as the Arusha Accords. The document set in place guidelines for dealing with the aftermath of the Burundian civil war, calling for ceasefires among all factions and groups; power sharing agreements in a transitional government and, eventually, a permanent, democratically elected government; and, a truth and reconciliation commission to explore the lasting legacy of the decades of violence, among other goals.²¹

While there were still some small pockets of ethnic violence after the Arusha Accords were signed, the country's long civil war effectively ended. Burundi approved its new constitution at the beginning of 2005, and elections were held that summer. In September 2006, the Security Council authorized the transfer of a military battalion and related personnel from the UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB) to the peacekeeping mission in the DRC (MONUC).²² One of the terms of the settlement of the conflicts was the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission modeled on the successful South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the 1990s. Those suspected of human rights abuses and politically motivated murderers must face their victims and the surviving relatives, spouses, and children of their victims and confess to their crimes in hopes of being granted amnesty. “The task is huge. Ethnic massacres have been committed with impunity for over four decades and many Burundians are skeptical of what the new commission will achieve.”²³

The Slippery Slope of Secession: Britain, Kosovo, and Taiwan

A critical concern for many national governments, international organizations, including the UN System, and civil society representatives is that ethnic and/or religious minorities may in fact desire their own separate state or homeland. In many instances this may lead to civil, and at times interstate, war. In Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, and many other countries, conflicts between ethnic and religious minorities and the majority and/or dominant societies with governmental authorities led to decades of intense armed conflict and civil war, resulting in tens of thousands of civilian and military casualties and lasting societal wounds. In recent years, plebiscites in Catalonia and Scotland have triggered actual and prospective constitutional crises and raised fears that renewed conflict is a real possibility. In the Balkan Peninsula, the country, or Serbian

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi, 28 August 2000.

²² S/RES/1711 September 29, 2006.

²³ Walker, Robert, “Burundi: a question of justice” BBC News November 11, 2005.

province, of Kosovo, depending on individual and national perspectives, represents either an ethnic Albanian majority unjustly placed under Serbian control for decades or an ethnic Albanian minority community selfishly severing Serbia's territorial integrity.

Initial international reaction was sharply divided over recognizing Kosovo as an independent country. Serbia and Russia declared Kosovo's declaration to be illegal and a number of other states have expressed considerable reservations about Kosovo's independence. Serbian President Boris Tadic warned the Security that "there are dozens of various Kosovos in the world and all of lie in wait for Kosovo's act of secession to become a reality and to be established as an acceptable norm."²⁴ In 2008, within the European Union (EU), Cyprus, Romania, Spain, and then Security Council member Slovakia opposed Kosovo's declaration of independence, often because of possible tensions with minority populations within their own territories.²⁵ China noted that "Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) remained the political and legal basis for the settlement of the Kosovo issue" and that "if a resolution adopted by the Council was not observed and implemented, the resolution in question would become a mere scrap of paper, and the authority and credibility of the Council would be compromised."²⁶ There is also considerable speculation that China is withholding recognition of Kosovo because of concerns that this might embolden the Republic of China, commonly called Chinese Taipei or Taiwan. On the other hand, as of January May 15, 2021, at least 117 countries have recognized Kosovo's independence²⁷, including the United States and most of the European Union. Serbian concerns about additional EU countries, particularly Greece, recognizing Kosovo's independence continue to dominate Serbian foreign policy initiatives.²⁸

For Kosovo, "membership in the UN is the final goal; with recognition from an increasing number of states the interim one. Its other priority is integration of northern Kosovo and its border with Serbia into its legal order."²⁹ Obtaining UN membership will ultimately require at the very least Chinese and Russian abstentions or acquiescence; in the case of Russia, specifically, protections for the Serb population in Kosovo will be non-negotiable.

Counterpoints

Reviewing the discourse around this subject, it might be easy to categorize any support for minority rights and anti-discriminatory legislation as the "morally righteous" path and to brand those who argue against such protections as racist, intolerant and opposed to living in a pluralistic and democratic society. However, analysis of individual circumstances and scenarios can sometimes reveal gray areas where competing priorities may not always be clear cut. Indeed,

²⁴ SC/9252 "Security Council Meets in Emergency Session Following Kosovo's Declaration of Independence, with Members Sharply Divided on Issue" February 18, 2008 p. 4.

²⁵ BBC News, "Saying 'no' to Kosovo independence," March 5, 2008.

²⁶ SC/9252 February 18, 2008 p. 6.

²⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora in the Republic of Kosovo, "International Recognitions of The Republic of Kosovo," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora in The Republic of Kosovo, May 15, 2021.

²⁸ Georgi Gotev, "Serbia fears EU will pressure Greece to recognize Kosovo" EurActiv.com August 17, 2015.

²⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG), "Serbia and Kosovo: The Path to Normalisation" Crisis Group Europe Report No. 223 February 19, 2013 p. 6.

there are times where the protection of minority rights can come into conflict with other principles enshrined in both national laws as well as international conventions.

Take for example the 2011 French ban on full-face veils (or niqāb) in any public place, excluding those of religious worship.³⁰ The ban generated great controversy both in France and other parts of the Western world. This was preceded by a 2004 ban on headscarves and all religious symbols or icons in state schools.³¹ There is no doubt the ban was specifically targeted at Muslim women, although within this community only a fraction wore the full-face covering.³² While there was an outcry about the ban, it was notable that leaders in the French Muslim community avoided rebuking the law and stated that “the niqāb was not prescribed in Islam, that in the French and contemporary context its spread was associated with radicalisation and criminal behavior, and that its wearing was inconsistent with France's concept of the secular state.”³³

Outside France, there was a large uproar and condemnation, especially from Muslim-majority countries. Arguments in support of the ban included feminists and some human rights groups believed wearing these coverings can symbolize a woman’s submission to men, as well as arguments that the overt religious display ran afoul with French secular laws which harms the unity and secularism of the French Republic. Both arguments show the difficulties in balancing individual religious freedoms and rights with concepts such as gender equality, secular values and policies that foster the assimilation of minorities into general society.

Similar arguments have arisen in the United States which has often been considered a melting pot, where over time, “generations of immigrants have melted together: they have abandoned their cultures to become totally assimilated into American society.” This contrasts with the analogue of a salad bowl where “where cultural diversity is considered a positive thing, immigrants have always been encouraged to maintain their traditions and their native language.”³⁴ The challenge in integrating minorities into a society does involve a degree of assimilation and finding a common set of culture and values; It does not necessitate abandoning one’s own religion or language to do so. The balancing act between the two concepts is not so easy for minority groups to do in practice. Some have pointed to the problem of Islamic radicalization in Europe (especially when compared to the United States) as an example of where the failure to assimilate and integrate a minority group has left them economically stunted, stigmatized, and vulnerable to fundamentalist ideology.³⁵

³⁰ Burqa bans, headscarves and veils: a timeline of legislation in the west, The Guardian, March 14, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/14/headscarves-and-muslim-veil-ban-debate-timeline>

³¹ Ibid.

³² The French Ban on Full-Face Veils, Anna Mansson McGinty, University of Chicago, June 16, 2011 <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/french-ban-full-face-veils>

³³ Testimony at the mission d’information sur la pratique du port du voile intégral sur le territoire national, 8 October 2009, retrieved 24 March 2011

³⁴ Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?, cglearn.it, Accessed Jan 15th, 2018

<https://www.cglearn.it/mysite/civilization/american-culture/a-story-of-immigration/melting-pot-or-salad-bowl/>

³⁵ The Economist, “Islamic, yet integrated,” Sep 6th 2014

<https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21615611-why-muslims-fare-better-america-europe-islamic-yet-integrated>

At a philosophical level, the very idea of a group defining itself based on adherence to a certain faith and customs may itself be a trigger for intolerance.³⁶ When this group is in the majority it will likely seek to maximize the prospects for its members and limit the rights of other groups. It is therefore not difficult to see why minority groups on average tend to enjoy better opportunities and freedom of expression in secular societies versus overtly religious ones. However, as seen with the French -Muslim community, there are limits to the freedoms allotted even in so-called secular states.

Finally, it should be noted that in the context of ethnic and religious minority group rights, individuals that identify as atheistic or agnostic, or who otherwise refrain from practicing any type of divine worship, also experience discrimination and disenfranchisement. This community, sometimes called non-believers, experience oppression across world societies and especially in non-secular states.³⁷ Non-believers face discrimination when running for office, can be persecuted or executed for their lack of belief in the divine,³⁸ and in many parts of the world must limit their discourse for fear of offending those who practice a religion.³⁹

Conclusion

The critical governmental tasks of promoting and protecting the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, while simultaneously preserving territorial integrity and state sovereignty, confront many of the UN System's member states as well as the UN System itself. Preservation and protection of minority rights is more feasible and ultimately more sustainable when achieved through continuing multistakeholder dialogues within and between societies. Delegates to the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Treatment of Ethnic and Religious Minorities are tasked with receiving, analyzing and sharing the wisdom and best practices that member states and their respective populations have developed and implemented. Saving successive generations from the various scourges of discrimination, intolerance, and even war are the stakes; it is the world's fondest wish that these deliberations are comprehensive, meaningful and productive.

³⁶ Griffiths, Paul. *Problems of Religious Diversity. Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*. Blackwell Publishers, 2001. ISBN 0-631-21150-0

³⁷ Robert Evans, "Atheists around world suffer persecution, discrimination: report", Reuters Dec 9, 2012 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-religion-atheists/atheists-around-world-suffer-persecution-discrimination-report-idUSBRE8B900520121210>

³⁸ Independent.co.uk, Siobhan Fenton, "The 13 countries where being an atheist is punishable by death," Mar 30 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/the-13-countries-where-being-an-atheist-is-punishable-by-death-a6960561.html>

³⁹ Ibid.

Guiding Questions for Debate

- How do states and the UN System balance the need for minority group rights with the needs of the state and other issues such as sovereignty, desire for governments not to see nations split on ethnic and religious lines and potentially secession and armed conflict?
- Should this committee consider protection of ethnic majorities in situations like Burundi? What should be the defining characteristics of a group that the UN should protect?
- Is the creation of an ethnic state a feasible solution for any of the conflicts in the world today? If not, what other options exist?

Resource Review

Primary Documents

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 75/188, (A/RES/75/188), “Freedom of religion or belief,” December 16, 2020. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3896444?ln=en>.

This General Assembly Resolution reaffirms the rights of all humans to their own system of religion or belief, and calls for elimination of any persecution on a religious basis. Delegates are encouraged to read this before writing their position papers in order to fully understand the religious rights of individuals as recognized by the UN, and as basis for further such declarations referenced in the document.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 75/173, (A/RES/75/173), “Universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination,” December 16, 2020. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3896426?ln=en>.

This General Assembly Resolution reaffirms the rights of all humans to self-determination. Delegates are suggested to read this short resolution and make use of its references as further primary resources.

Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation 2010 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinorityRights_en.pdf.

This Report, summarizing and referencing a number of UN documents, categorizes the protections and rights conveyed to all humankind by UN and global resolutions. This report is important for delegates in their research to recognize the specific goals of the committee. Delegates should focus on the rights to survival and existence, promotion/protection of the identity of minorities, equality and non-discrimination, and effective and meaningful participation.

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), “The Responsibility to Protect” December 2001 <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/18432/IDL-18432.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y>.

This report critically distilled the concept that state sovereignty is in fact earned as a result of the state meeting its responsibilities to protect and meet the needs of its own population. Delegates are encouraged to read this as a basis for evaluation of their own country’s commitment and effectiveness in meeting the needs of indigenous and minority populations

Gareth Evans “The Responsibility to Protect: An Idea Whose Time Has Come ... and Gone?” September 2008 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0047117808094173>.

This criticism of “The Responsibility to Protect” by the co-chair of the commission at the time of the report clarifies points made, and addresses inadequacies of the original report

that resulted in “an evasion of a number of governments of the commitments they signed up to”. Delegates are encouraged to read this as a basis for evaluation of their country’s commitment to the issue, or as a source to challenge the basis of this committee’s discussion.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 75/237, (A/RES/75/237), “A global call for concrete action for the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action,” December 31, 2020 <https://undocs.org/A/RES/75/237>.

This General Assembly Resolution reinforces the importance of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, originally adopted in 1965 and calls upon states to ratify the the Convention. Additionally, 75/237 recognizes the shortfalls of the Convention and the subsequent need for other actions such as the International Decade for People of African Descent and the Programme for the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. Delegates should read this to understand the actions of the United Nations in combating racism and where the UN can improve and modernize its response to racial discrimination worldwide.

Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinorityRights_en.pdf.

The OHCHR’s comprehensive report on Minority Rights is an excellent source for delegates to understand not only the basic facts about minority rights on an international scale, but also addresses questions that can help delegates analyze minority rights and find UN-based solutions to help protect those rights.

Secondary Documents

“Who are the Kurds?” BBC, 15 October 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440>

This BBC report gives an in-depth look at the Kurdish people’s history, as well as provides a modern day update on how they have been involved in the fight against the Islamic State and how modern day states, especially Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, view the Kurds. Delegates are encouraged to read this and other related articles to gain a holistic understanding of the Kurdish people and how their modern day situation relates to the topic at hand.

“Pawns’: Serbs in north Kosovo stuck in simmering dispute,” France 24, November 23, 2021 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211123-pawns-serbs-in-north-kosovo-stuck-in-simmering-dispute>.

This article provides an update on the tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, and show the drastic effect the geopolitical situation still has on the people, especially in the city of Mitrovica. Delegates should read this article to gain a sense of perspective of how the situation in Kosovo concerning minority populations has changed since the nation declared independence in 2008.

"Burundi profile — timeline," BBC, 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13087604>.

This timeline by the BBC explores the tumultuous history of Burundi, with short explanations of major events that can help delegates learn about the topic and research beyond the scope of this article. Delegates should use this source as a way to learn about the history and current events of Burundi so they can research the topics they find most pertinent to this topic individually.

"Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar," Council on Foreign Relations, 2021 <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/rohingya-crisis-myanmar>.

This report by the CFR outlines the history and current situation of the Rohingya Crisis. Some recent updates include actions by the UNHCR which delegates may find pertinent to their research. Additionally, delegates should use this report to understand the scope of the crisis and as a starting point to researching what actions their member state has taken, if any, to aid the Rohingya.

Guiding Questions for Position Papers

- Are there ethnic and religious minority groups within the country you represent? How are they treated both now and historically? What steps have been taken to grant them equality and integrate them into society?
- What international resolutions and conventions has your country signed on to? Has your nation applied pressure to countries where minority groups are being oppressed? What has been the result?
- For your government, what are the specific obligations of states under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine and when should and/or must they be applied and why?
- Is the country you represent capable (financially or otherwise) of making any necessary changes to better represent and include minority groups? If not, what additional resources might you need?